

State Senator Tupac A. Hunter

Serving Detroit, Dearborn Heights & Inkster

Legislative Report



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MICHIGAN STATE SENATE
TUPAC A. HUNTER
STATE SENATOR • 5TH DISTRICT

Dear Friend,

This newsletter is intended to provide you with up-to-date information on the legislation that I am currently supporting on your behalf. You will find information on the most recent legislation that I have introduced which would help neighborhoods limit the shady practices of land speculators, bring much needed reform for child care reporting guidelines, protect citizen's rights under forfeiture laws, and help victims of crimes obtain justice.

The health, safety, and well-being of all my constituents continue to be my first and foremost priority. As your voice in Lansing, I will fight to represent your suggestions and support programs and legislation that will help you, your families, and all Michigan families across our great state. I can do my best for you when I hear from you, so please always feel free to contact my Lansing office toll-free at 1-866-262-7305 if you have any thoughts or questions you want to share. With your help and suggestions, we will continue moving forward to strengthen Michigan's economy for our families, our workers, and our children.

Sincerely,

Tupac A. Hunter

Senator Hunter's Fire-Safe Cigarette Bill Signed into Law



Senate Hunter is joined by fire and safety officials at a ceremonial signing by Governor Jennifer Granholm of Senate Bill 264, now Public Act 56 of 2009, to require that only fire-safe cigarettes be sold in Michigan.

Bills Would Revise Forfeiture Laws

I recently introduced legislation to revise Michigan's forfeiture laws to better protect citizens who are not charged with a crime or who are found to be innocent. Currently police can seize property and assets that they believe have been used in the commission of a crime. This means that people can lose their car, their money, and even their home. This is reasonable if an investigation leads to a person being charged and subsequently convicted. But, if the police fail to bring charges, or if someone is found to be innocent, then keeping their property is not a fair application of our forfeiture laws. My plan would protect innocent citizens by requiring that a person's property and assets be returned to them in a timely manner.

Senate Bills 1212 through 1217 would not allow any impound or forfeiture fees to be charged to the innocent individual. These bills would require that vehicles seized by state or local government under any current forfeiture laws for any reasons be returned within seven days if the owner is not charged with a crime, is found to be innocent, or is found not to be liable for a civil infraction. People who lose property for suspected violations of Michigan's tobacco tax law would also have their assets and property returned to them in a timely fashion if they are not charged or are found to be innocent.

Legislation Would Prevent Rape Kit Backlog at Crime Labs

I heard about the backlog of nearly 12,000 untested rape kits dating back to the mid 1990s that were found at the now closed Detroit Crime Lab. Each kit represents a victim that has suffered a violent attack, who then went through a lengthy evidence collection process which can be the difference between an arrest and conviction or an unsolved crime. These victims deserve justice and better treatment from our law enforcement system.

To deal with this problem Governor Granholm has recommended \$36.9 million for forensic science services in her 2010-2011 budget, as well as \$2.5 million in supplemental funding this year to help deal with the backlog that has grown since the Detroit Crime Lab was closed.

I believe that we must go even further and deal specifically with the backlog of rape kits with a new law. I will soon introduce legislation to ensure that these kinds of delays and backlogs will never happen again.

We need a law that requires law enforcement to notify victims of the status of the DNA testing in their case. We need a law that requires law enforcement agencies to annually report the number of rape kits in its possession that have not been tested or analyzed in recent years. We need this law so that we will never again be surprised by the discovery of a roomful of untested evidence for thousands of cases.



Join Senator Hunter for “Talk Time with Tupac”

Senator Hunter invites you to join him to personally share your ideas and concerns. Please call his office toll-free at 1-866-262-7305 to confirm your attendance. Be sure to leave a message if you call after hours.

Detroit: Mary's Grill, 20804 Plymouth Road

All coffee hours are held on the 1st Friday of the month from 10-11 a.m.

Inkster: McDonald's, 27125 Cherry Hill Road

All coffee hours are held on the 2nd Friday of the month from 10-11 a.m.

Dearborn Heights: McDonald's, 6412 North Telegraph Road

All coffee hours are held on the 3rd Friday of the month from 10-11 a.m.

Daycare Reporting Bill Approved

The Michigan Senate recently voted unanimously in favor of my bill creating stricter reporting guidelines for licensed child care facilities. Senate Bill 723 is part of a bipartisan package that will give parents more information about the daycare providers they choose to care for their children.

My bill would require that daycare providers maintain a licensing notebook that would provide background information on the licenser’s renewals, past rule violations, or special investigations conducted by the Department of Human Services (DHS). This licensing notebook would be available for parents and guardians during operating hours. DHS will include on the “Child In Care Form” a check box allowing the parent or guardian to acknowledge that they are aware of the licensing notebook as well as the DHS website where this information can be found. Under the bill, the DHS would not issue or renew a license or certificate of registration of a child care center, group care home, or family child care home if the licensee or applicant has had a previous license revoked due to a rule violation that resulted in the serious injury or death of a child while under their care.

The other bill in the package, Senate Bill 724 would require the Michigan Department of Human



Services (DHS) to provide a five year look-back on its web site for all daycare licenses. This would allow parents and guardians to cross-check a provider’s information with DHS information. Currently, DHS participates in onsite inspections of licensed daycare providers every two years and rule violations are posted online for a two year period until the next inspection. DHS does not report previous incidents, even if a child’s death occurred, before that two year period.

Several years ago a constituent of mine, Patricia Chorba, came to me and told me of the tragic death of her three month old son while he was in daycare. Ms. Chorba

asked all the right questions and chose what she thought was a safe daycare environment for her son. Ms. Chorba joined me in Lansing and testified when these bills were taken up in the Senate Committee on Families and Human Services. I really admire her courage and selflessness in working with me to ensure that in the future parents will have access to the information they need in order to assure the safety and security of their children. With her help, we are one step closer to providing better information about daycare providers to parents, and ensuring that children are safe while in daycare.

**Ms. Patricia Chorba’s name has been printed with her permission.*

Legislation Would Protect Communities from Land Speculators

We have all seen speculators who swoop into neighborhoods to buy up property at cheap prices and then wait for developers to come in so that they can sell that property for a huge profit. This activity does not help preserve and stabilize our neighborhoods because these speculators do not make any improvements to these properties. They just let them continue to sit while they wait for the right time to make their financial gain.

The way that we now auction off tax-foreclosed property must change in order to prohibit these

practices that are being done by land speculators. If there are no bids at a tax-foreclosed auction of a property then a second auction is held. At the second auction the minimum bid for a property in Detroit is \$500. In these instances, land speculators will buy the auctioned off property at a low bid and then will hold on to the property until it is picked up by a developer. These individuals can turn around and be paid tens of thousands of dollars for these properties that they buy cheaply at these second auctions. In the meantime, the speculator/owner does not pay taxes on or make

improvements to the property. This leaves many unattended properties that drive down the value of neighborhoods, and not to mention the time and money spent by the county to collect back taxes on these properties.

I will soon introduce legislation that will try to put a halt to this kind of land speculation. My legislation would allow Land Banks the option of transferring properties cost-free before the second auction. They would not be required to take properties, but could if they desired. If they did take the property, then it

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Senate Bills Would Help Homeowners Facing Foreclosure

Home foreclosures are stressful for homeowners, communities, and neighborhoods. Foreclosures are everyone's problem because they affect property values and can lead to population losses which affect job availability. To help solve this problem, Senate Democrats have sponsored a three bill package to prevent foreclosures and offer incentives to lenders. At the federal level, President Obama's Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan is working with lenders and homeowners to prevent foreclosure.

On a State level, Senate Bills 29 and 30 would give people extra time to straighten out their finances while they stay in their homes. Once a home is in foreclosure there is still a redemption period during which it can be reclaimed by paying what is owed. These bills would extend that redemption period to two years. Letting people stay in their home during this time gives them an incentive to sort out their finances in order to avoid foreclosure. Senate Bill 31 gives lenders incentives to work with people trying to redeem

their homes. The bill gives the lender loan guarantees through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) for the homeowners that qualify for the extended time period under Senate Bill 29. Foreclosure is a two-pronged issue and we have to work with both the homeowner and the lender to solve the problem. At present, Senate Bills 29, 30 and 31 are in the Senate Committee on Banking and Financial Institutions.

President Obama's plan will help millions of homeowners across Michigan and throughout the country that are doing their best to meet their payments. The comprehensive \$75 billion plan works with homeowners, lenders and their mortgage servicers, and investors to lower interest rates to help citizens reach affordable monthly payments. The plan offers incentives to lenders and servicers to modify interest rates on mortgages to create an affordable monthly mortgage payment. Homeowners suffering from falling property values also get a helping hand from this plan. Many of these people have not met the 20 percent equity requirement

necessary to refinance their loan. Under the President's plan they would qualify for refinancing into a lower monthly payment. As of last October, approximately 920,000 loan modifications have been offered to more than 3.2 million eligible homeowners.

Just last month the President announced another plan to help Michigan and four other states with hard-hit housing markets. This plan would give Michigan a share of \$1.5 billion to help unemployed borrowers, those who own more on their home than it is now worth, and homeowners having trouble staying current on either a second mortgage or a home equity credit line. State officials should soon know how much Michigan will receive from this program. They will then design plans on how to best use this money to help struggling homeowners.

No one wins in a foreclosure. By working together with these state and federal programs, we can help hardworking families stay in their homes, which will help stabilize our communities and cities.

Land Speculators *continued from page 3*

would prevent speculators from purchasing these properties. My legislation would also insert a 'reverter clause' in all contracts that a bidder signs when purchasing a property. The speculators would be mandated to use the land under specific terms,

or the land would revert back to public ownership which would be the Land Bank. Speculators would be unable to hold onto the land tax-free without suffering consequences for not making any improvements.

Stable neighborhoods are important to our state's economic recovery. I believe that tackling the problem of land speculators will help make our communities more attractive to families and new companies.